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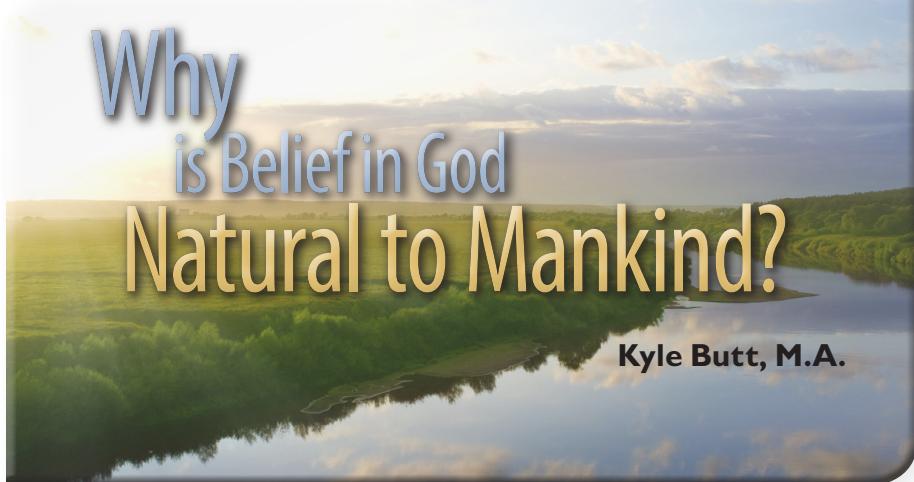
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WHY IS BELIEF IN GOD *Natural to Mankind?*

God's Destruction of the Canaanites

New DVD on Atheism



Why is Belief in God Natural to Mankind?

Kyle Butt, M.A.

ON June 18, 2012, well-known and much-read atheistic blogger Leah Libresco put out a blog post titled: “This Is My Last Post for the Patheos Atheist Portal” (Merica, 2012). In the post, Libresco explained that she was no longer writing for the atheist portal because she is no longer an atheist. During the months prior to the post, her mental struggles and rational investigations led her to the conclusion that God exists (Libresco, 2012).

What was the primary factor that forced Libresco to this theistic conclusion? She explained that morality was the key. Throughout her time as an atheist, she struggled to come to grips with how humans can adhere to a morality that seems objective if there is no God. As she searched for answers among atheistic thinkers and writers, she admitted that their answers were inadequate.

In an interview with a CNN news reporter, Libresco noted that her conversion from atheism to theism was “kinda the same thing with any scientific theory, almost, **that it had more explanatory power to explain something I was really sure of**. I’m really sure that morality is objective, human independent; something we uncover like archaeologists not something we build like architects” (Merica, 2012, emp. added).

Libresco’s intellectual honesty regarding morality is refreshing to see. [NOTE: A.P. does not endorse Libresco’s affiliation with Catholicism. See Pinedo,

2008.] Her conversion highlights an important aspect of the process of searching for truth: explanatory value. With an ever-increasing number of skeptics, unbelievers, atheists, and agnostics in the United States and around the globe, it is important for Christians to look for ways to teach them about God, and then Jesus Christ. One effective way to do that is to show that the concept of God maintains much more powerful explanatory value than atheism for the realities that we see around us. Thus, when approaching a reality upon which both theists and atheists agree, the question would be: “Which idea, theism or atheism, explains this particular phenomenon the best?” To frame it in a more positive way, “If there really is a God, what would we expect the world to look like?” Leah Libresco recognized the reality of objective morality and concluded that if atheism were true, there would be no objective morality; but if there is a God, then objective morality is exactly what we would expect to find.

That principle can be extended to a host of realities that are present in our world. The one that this article addresses is the fact that mankind has an inherent predisposition to recognize a supernatural, intelligent Creator. This article establishes the fact that this reality is generally recognized by both atheists and theists. It will then address which of these two ideas, atheism or theism, most adequately accounts for this fact. The purpose of such an endeavor is to reach the unbelieving community with

powerful evidence that has the ability to bring them to a belief in God, and one step closer to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

HUMANITY’S “INTUITIVE THEISM”

IT might surprise the reader that both atheists and theists overwhelmingly admit that humans are predisposed to believe in an intelligent creator of some sort. Richard Dawkins, arguably the world’s leading atheistic thinker, lecturer, and writer, asked the question: “Why, if it is false, does every culture in the world have religion? True or false, religion is ubiquitous, so where does it come from?” (2006, p. 159). His assertion that religion is false is inaccurate, but his statement highlights the fact—the reality—that religion is universal to mankind, and has been in every human culture ever studied. He went on to say, a few pages later: “Though the details differ across the world, no known culture lacks some version of the time-consuming, wealth-consuming, hostility-provoking rituals, the anti-factual, counter-productive fantasies of religion” (p. 166). So deeply religious are humans, Dawkins refers to their desire to recognize some type of creator as a “lust for gods” (p. 169). The late atheistic writer Christopher Hitchens wrote: “Sigmund Freud was quite correct to describe the religious impulse, in *The Future of an Illusion*, as essentially ineradicable until or unless the human species can conquer its fear of death and its tendency to wish-thinking. Neither contingency seems very probable” (2007, p. 247).

Renowned atheist Sam Harris was forced to admit the truth that the concept of God is an inherent human predisposition. He wrote: “Similarly, several experiments suggest that children are predisposed to assume design and intention behind natural events—leaving many psychologists and anthropologists to believe that children, left entirely to their own devices, would invent some conception of God” (2010, p. 151).

The research to which Sam Harris refers is extensive. Paul Bloom and Deena Skolnick Weisberg have written an article, titled “Childhood Origins of

Adult Resistance to Science,” which was published in *Science* magazine in May of 2007. They suggest that children tend to attribute purpose and design to virtually everything, a tendency the authors call “promiscuous teleology” ([316]:996). Bloom and Weisberg noted: “[W]hen asked about the origin of animals and people, children spontaneously tend to provide and prefer creationist explanations” (p. 996).

In an article titled “Are Children ‘Intuitive Theists?’” Deborah Keleman documented research which led her to conclude that “the proposal that children might be intuitive theists becomes increasingly viable,” and “together, these research findings tentatively suggest that children’s explanatory approach may be accurately characterized as intuitive theism” (2004, 15:299). In an extensive 49-page article in *Cognitive Psychology*, Margaret Evans wondered aloud: “Why is the human mind (at least the Western protestant mind) so susceptible to creationism and so comparatively resistant to naturalistic explanations for the origins of species?” (2001, 42:252).

In light of the current research, Bloom admitted: “There is by now a large body of research suggesting that humans are natural-born creationists. When we see nonrandom structure and design, we assume that it was created by an intelligent being” (Bloom, 2009, p. 3). He opined: “Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins was right to complain, then, that it seems ‘as if the human brain were specifically designed to misunderstand Darwinism’” (p. 3). Some atheists, like David Mills, writing for a more popular audience, assert that we “should recognize that all children are born atheists. There is no child born with a religious belief” (2006, p. 29). But that assertion misses the point that humans are born with the predisposition to theistic conclusions. Overwhelmingly, the atheistic community recognizes the reality that humans are born with a “lust for gods,” a “promiscuous teleology,” and a penchant toward “intuitive theism.”

Theists likewise concur that humans have an inherent predisposition to conclude an intelligent Creator exists.

Theistic apologist Paul Copan describes mankind’s tendency toward creation as a “religious impulse” that is “deeply imbedded” in the universal human thought process (2011, p. 30). We could supply scores of similar statements from creationists that would underscore the obvious conclusion that, by and large, the creationist community agrees with the atheistic community that there is a universal, built-in, in-born, intuitive human tendency to believe in an intelligent creator. The question then arises, which understanding of origins, atheism or theism, best explains why humanity exhibits “intuitive theism”? One key to arriving at the answer to this question is to understand the problems this reality poses for atheistic, naturalistic explanations of the Universe.

THEISM AND RELIGION ARE “COSTLY” CONCEPTS

ACCORDING to naturalistic, atheistic assumptions for the origin of the Universe and the evolutionary assumption for the origin of mankind, everything that exists must have a naturalistic cause. By that, it is understood that atheistic evolutionists must present a reason to explain why humans are “intuitive theists” that corresponds with their atheistic beliefs that the material Universe is all there is. The problem

that the atheistic community runs into in this regard is that the ideas of religion and theism run counter to what one would expect to find if atheism and naturalistic evolution were true. According to evolution [by this we mean atheistic, naturalistic evolution in which no intelligent designer played any part], natural selection eliminates physical structures and mental states that are costly in terms of their survival value. For instance, if there developed in a certain sub-group of humans the intuitive idea that rabid Kodiak bears made good pets, that group would soon be killed by such bears, and whatever aspect of the brain that housed the belief would be eliminated from the human population as a whole.

To illustrate further, if a certain group of humans tended to spend lots of effort on religious ceremonies that had nothing to do with their physical survival, and another group did not “waste” their resources on anything but their physical survival, natural selection would suggest that those “religious” people who “wasted” their resources would eventually lose out in the race for physical survival. And the “non-religious” group would be selected by nature to become more prevalent and replace the “wasteful” religious group. Yet, we see just the opposite.

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Richard Dawkins acknowledged this problem facing atheistic ideas. He stated: "Religion is so wasteful, so extravagant; and Darwinian selection habitually targets and eliminates waste" (2006, p. 163). Atheistic philosopher Daniel Dennett stated: "Whatever else religion is as a human phenomenon, it is a hugely costly endeavor, and evolutionary biology shows that nothing so costly just happens" (2006, p. 69). What do these atheistic writers mean when they say that religion is "wasteful" and "so costly"? Dennett expounded on the idea when he said that when people look at humanity all over the world

what they see today is a population of over six billion people, almost all of whom devote a significant fraction of their time and energy to some sort of religious activity: rituals such as daily prayer (both public and private) or frequent attendance at ceremonies, but also costly sacrifices—not working on certain days no matter what looming crisis needs prompt attention...and abiding by a host of strenuously observed prohibitions and requirements (p. 75).

Dawkins expanded his ideas of "wasteful" as well, when he said:

Religion can endanger the life of the pious individual, as well as the lives of others. Thousands of people have been tortured for their loyalty to a religion, persecuted by zealots for what is in many cases a scarcely distinguishable alternative faith.... Devout people have died for their gods and killed for them; whipped blood from their backs, sworn themselves to a lifetime of celibacy or to lonely silence, all in the service of religion. What is it all for? What is the benefit? (pp. 164-165).

In their discussions and writings, atheists have sometimes suggested that religion possibly has such overwhelming health benefits that it is "worth" the expense. They note such things as the results of some research to suggest that prayer can lower stress levels or blood pressure. Or they comment on the emotional benefits of fitting into a community, which religious rituals would foster and encourage. Virtually across the board, however, they have

rejected the idea that religion is actually beneficial for the physical survival of mankind. They contend that such minor advantages as lower stress levels or lower blood pressure certainly cannot justify the massive expenditure of resources on religion. [NOTE: It is easy to see why they have rejected those explanations. If religion actually provides benefits that would be greater than any negative consequences, then it would be better for humanity to hang on to religious ideas regardless of their factuality or validity. Since most modern atheists are calling for the eradication of religion, they are forced to downplay its benefits and look for another answer that could compel people to want to eliminate religion. While we certainly are not suggesting the idea that religion is beneficial and that is why it "evolved," it is plain to see why the current atheistic community has forsaken it.]

Sam Harris contended, "And even if tribes have occasionally been the vehicles of natural selection, and religion proved adaptive, it would remain an open question whether religion increases human fitness today" (p. 151). The current atheistic consensus is that religion does not bestow upon humanity enough physical benefit to "increase human fitness." How, then, do atheists respond to the two facts that (1) humans are intuitively theistic and (2) such religious theism is extremely costly and does not bestow physical survival fitness on our species?

THE CURRENT ATHEISTIC ANSWER: RELIGION IS A VIRUS OR BY-PRODUCT

WHAT naturalistic explanation can be given to account for the ubiquitous and extremely costly nature of religion? In their attempt to show that theism is unnecessary and ultimately harmful, the atheistic community has concocted the idea that theistic ideas are analogous to mind-viruses that infect a person, not for the benefit of the person, but for the benefit of the mind-virus. In other words, theism is a mind-virus that has been passed from host human to host human for its own survival, and not for the benefit of the human organisms it inhabits. Dawkins explained: "The

fact that religion is ubiquitous probably means that it has worked to the benefit of something, but it may not be us or our genes. It may be to the benefit of only the religious ideas themselves, to the extent that they behave in a some-what gene-like way, as replicators" (p. 165).

Dawkins has expounded upon this idea and used the term "memes" to describe ideas that he asserts behave in ways similar to genes. He contends that theism is a "meme" that acts as a mental virus, infecting people and forcing them to replicate the meme by teaching others about it and expending vast resources on it. Along these lines, Dan Dennett has suggested that "the common cold is universal to all human peoples in much the same way as religion is, yet we would not want to suggest that colds benefit us" (p. 165). Dennett, using the meme idea, asserted: "The meme theory accounts for this. According to this theory, the ultimate beneficiaries of religious adaptations are the memes themselves..." (p. 186).

Atheist Darrell Ray wrote an entire book, *The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture*, based on this idea. He opened by saying:

It was not until Richard Dawkins' idea of "viruses of the mind" that we gained a ready-made way to examine religion as closely as we look at the epidemiology of the flu virus. This book will show how religions of all kinds fit in the natural world, how they function in our minds and culture and how similar they are to the germs, parasites and viruses that inhabit our bodies (2009, p. 13).

To build his case for the "religion-as-a-virus" idea, he mentioned numerous things that he perceives as validating evidence of his assertion. He wrote: "Once a person has converted to a religion, it is difficult to have a rational conversation about the irrational aspects of his religion. It is as though something invaded the person and took over a part of his personality" (p. 20). He went on to discuss the situation in which a friend lost his father to cancer. Before the loss, the friend was "non-religious." But after the father's death, the friend

"got a severe case of religion that changed his personality dramatically." Ray says "there was no way to have a conversation with him on any subject without religion creeping in" (p. 19). He further asserted that "stress can activate the chicken pox virus in adults, leading to the condition known as shingles. Similarly, stress tends to reactivate the god virus in many people" (p. 25).

Other alleged symptoms of the "god virus" include the idea that "religion always functions to ensure its own survival," just as a virus does (Ray, p. 36). To undergird this assertion, Ray said: "Go into any Christian bookstore, and you will find books about living in a secular world, living with a spouse who is not saved or how to convert friends and relatives. The god virus is always concerned with protecting and expanding its territory—that is what these books are all about" (p. 176). Ray has taken Dawkins' meme/mental virus idea to its logical conclusion.

THE SIMPLEST RESPONSE TO THE GOD VIRUS IDEA

ONE very simple idea clearly manifests the flaws in the God virus concept. If thoughts or ideas were self-sustaining, self-replicating "memes" that were simply out for their own survival, that would mean that the idea of atheism would fall under the same condemnation as a "selfish meme" ensuring its own survival to the potential detriment of its host. By what criteria could anyone discern between "real" ideas and those dastardly memes infecting the brain. If someone did propose a set of criteria, who is to say that such criteria are not, themselves, a menacing meme that is infecting the mind of the person trying to weed out memes? And how would we know that the concept of a meme is not merely a meme in and of itself infecting the minds of atheists who present the idea? The reader can see how quickly such a discussion would digress into intellectual chaos. Furthermore, how could people be held responsible for anything they think or do? "My memes made me do it!" would become the mantra for all kinds of

malicious crimes. And while atheists have attempted to provide answers to such problems, if memes really do exist as individual entities, who is to say that such "answers" are more than memes?

In fact, when analyzing the writings of those who present the "meme/virus" idea, the reader can quickly ascertain the flaw in their reasoning. For instance, Ray said that when the religious virus took over his friend after his father's death, the friend mentioned religion in virtually every conversation. But the same could be said for any number of individuals who have become outspoken atheists, who insist on inserting their unbelief in virtually every conversation they have.

Ray stated: "In viral terms, it means that people are so deeply infected that they are immune to influence and generally ignore any evidence that contradicts their beliefs" (p. 39). Yet it can be shown that the available scientific evidence contradicts major tenets of atheistic evolution, a fact that is generally ignored by the atheistic community (see Miller, 2012; Miller, 2013). In addition, we mentioned that Ray said: "Go into any Christian bookstore, and you will find books about living in a secular world, living with a spouse who is not saved or how to convert friends and relatives. The god virus is always concerned with protecting and expanding its territory—that is what these books are all about." What, pray tell, are the books, tracts, DVDs, and pamphlets about atheism designed to do? Are they not written for the very purpose of protecting and expanding the "territory" of atheism?

Listen to the atheists themselves as they describe their "religious" efforts. Prolific atheistic writer and debater, Dan Barker, likened his teaching about atheism to "evangelism" and he stated: "Representing the Freedom From Religion Foundation, I get to engage in similar atheist 'missionizing' all across the American continent...." At one point he said, "Atheist 'evangelism' doesn't just happen in front of an audience" (2008, p. 325).

Notice the irony of the fact that the first chapter of Dawkins' book *The God*

Delusion is titled "A Deeply Religious Non-Believer." In that chapter, he quotes Carl Sagan's writings from a book titled *A Pale Blue Dot*. Sagan wrote: "A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths." Dawkins then stated: "All Sagan's books touch the nerve-endings of transcendent wonder that religion has monopolized in past centuries. My own books have the same aspiration. Consequently I hear myself often described as a deeply religious man" (p. 12). Additionally, Ray rails on "religion" as a destructive meme/virus, and yet throughout his book, he capitalizes the terms atheist and atheism consistently. One example is when he states: "In fact, the only thing you can get some Atheists to agree upon is that there is no god" (pp. 51-52). Is it not the "religious" concept "that there is no god" that could easily be put forth as the meme that has infected so many minds to the detriment of the host human and in spite of a vast amount of evidence to the contrary? Such is the double-edged sword of the meme/virus concept. If it cuts at all (which it does not), then it cuts both ways.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD PROVIDES THE LOGICAL ANSWER

UP to this point we have established that both atheists and theists admit that humans are "intuitive theists." That is, the belief in an intelligent Creator comes naturally to humans. This idea poses a serious problem for the atheist because the concepts of God and/or religion are extremely costly to the human species. Thus, in an attempt to explain why theism is so prevalent, they liken it to a mental virus that is out for its own survival and not for the benefit of the "host organism." This explanation, and others like it, fail since arguments used to dismiss the validity of theism and religion would be equally effective to demote **all** concepts—including atheism—to "by-products" and "memes." Thus, we are forced to conclude, as Paul Copan did: "Attempts by these New

(cont. on p. 56)



The atheistic community has initiated a ruthless attack against the God of the Bible. High profile atheists accuse God of being a brutal tyrant Who enforces His petty whims by acts of violence. These spokesmen for godlessness insist that the Bible writers condone immorality and approve of sexism and cruel, human slavery. According to them, atheism offers a much better moral system than the Bible. *Answering Atheism* strips these groundless accusations of their misleading trappings, and lays bare the fact that God and His Word provide the only viable foundation upon which to build a moral system.

Lesson Topics



Moral Implications of Atheism	(34 min.)
Death of the Innocent	(33 min.)
The Bible and Slavery	(39 min.)
The Biblical View of Women	(40 min.)
Evil, Pain, and Suffering	(24 min.)
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Atheists to explain away theology as a useful fiction, or worse, a harmful delusion, fall short of telling us why the religious impulse is so deeply imbedded. If God exists, however, we have an excellent reason as to why religious fervor should exist” (p. 30).

In other words, if there really is a God, Who is an intelligent, supernatural Creator Who loves mankind and desires that mankind should know the truth, what would we expect to see? We would expect to find humans “pre-programmed” for a belief in God. Of course, we would not expect all humans to come to the proper conclusion that God exists, since a loving God would equip humans with the capacity to choose what to believe and how they choose to behave. We would, however, expect God to have so designed humans that to dismiss the concepts of creation or theism would be unnatural and would require some type of reverse programming. That an intelligent Designer exists is the answer which maintains the most powerful explanatory value.

In fact, further reading into the atheistic literature makes known the fact that atheism is “unnatural” in the sense that it is not how the human mind is designed to perceive the world. Let us refer back to the Bloom and Weisberg article titled “Childhood Origins of Adult Resistance to Science.” It is important to understand their definition of the term “science.” Their research was done in order to show why many Americans reject atheistic evolution. Thus, the term “science” is equated with “atheistic evolution” in their writing. Understanding this to be the case, notice that they said: “The main reason why people resist certain scientific [read that atheistic evolutionary—KB] findings, then, is that many of these findings are unnatural and unintuitive” (2007, 316:996). Keleman concurred when she wrote: “The implication is that children’s science failures may, in part, result from inherent conflicts between intuitive ideas and the basic tenets of contemporary scientific [atheistic evolutionary—KB] thought” (2004, 15:299). In Dawkins’ discussion of the situation,

he includes the fact that Bloom says that humans are “innately predisposed to be creationists.” Dawkins then comments that “natural selection ‘makes no intuitive sense.’” Thus, he concludes that children are “native teleologists, and many never grow out of it” (pp. 180-181).

Notice the admission by these atheistic writers. They are forced **by the evidence** to admit that humans are naturally inclined to believe in an intelligent Designer. They are further forced **by the evidence** to conclude that the various tenets of atheistic evolution are counterintuitive and unnatural. Yet, **in spite of the evidence**, they cling to the idea that somehow this situation can be reconciled with the belief that God does not exist. Notice that a presumption of atheism could never have predicted the situation that humans would be “intuitive theists.” Nor do the purported atheistic answers to the problem provide adequate explanatory value. **The simple and most powerfully supported conclusion is that God exists**, and that is why humans are “innately predisposed to be creationists.”

THE NEXT STEP

ONCE God’s existence is established using humanity’s “intuitive theism,” the next step would be to see how God expects His creatures to use this preprogrammed disposition. If we can establish that the Bible is God’s Word (and we can, see Butt, 2007), then we can go to it to determine the proper human response. First, we can see that God expects everyone to use this predisposition to accurately assess the evidence He has provided to come to the conclusion that He exists. Romans 1:19-21 bears this out:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who **suppress the truth** in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is **manifest in them**, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are **without**

excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened (emp. added).

Notice that the biblical text makes it clear that these men “suppress the truth” even though “what may be known of God is **manifest in them**.” Furthermore, unbelievers will be “without excuse” because they are equipped with the evidence, and the inherent predisposition and ability to arrive at the proper conclusion.

In his sermon on Mars Hill to the Athenians, the apostle Paul explained that the Creator “has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the Earth...so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26-27). Paul’s statement corresponds perfectly with the idea that God has so designed humans that they naturally “groped” for Him. This would also fit perfectly with the fact that “many psychologists and anthropologists [are led] to believe that children, left entirely to their own devices, would invent some conception of God” (Harris, p. 151). Humans are “groping” for God.

Notice, then, the divine program for salvation. First, a person gropes for a Creator. That person is able to find the Creator Who designed humans and instilled within them the ability to know Him. Their knowledge of this Creator should lead them to the conclusion that humans are His offspring and not the product of a naturalistic, chance process (Acts 17:29). This truth was sufficiently verified by the life and death of Jesus Christ, Who will ultimately judge all mankind based on the plenteous evidence God has supplied and their inherent ability to assess that evidence correctly (Acts 17:31).

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God’s Just Destruction of the Canaanites

Eric Lyons, M.Min.

In the 1930s and 40s, the Nazi regime committed state-sponsored genocide of so-called “inferior races.” Of the approximately nine million Jews who lived in Europe at the beginning of the 1930s, some six million of them were exterminated. The Nazis murdered approximately one million Jewish children, two million Jewish women, and three million Jewish men. The Jews were starved, gassed, and experimented on like animals. In addition, Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime slaughtered another three million Poles, Soviets, gypsies, and people with disabilities (see “Holocaust,” 2011 for more information). Most sane people, including Christians and many atheists (e.g., Antony Flew, Wallace Matson), have interpreted the Nazis’ actions for what they were—cruel, callous, and nefarious.

Some 3,400 years before the Holocaust, the God of the Bible commanded the Israelites to “destroy all the inhabitants of the land” of Canaan (Joshua 9:24). They were to conquer, kill, and cast out the Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (Exodus 23:23; Deuteronomy 7:1-2; Joshua 3:10). After crossing the Jordan River, we learn in the book of Joshua that the Israelites “utterly destroyed all that was in the city [of Jericho], both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.... [T]hey burned the city and all that was in it with fire” (Joshua 6:21,24). They also “utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai” (Joshua 8:26), killing 12,000 men and women, and hanging their king (8:25,29). In Makkedah and Libnah, the Israelites “let none remain” (Joshua 10:28,30). They struck Lachish “and all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword” (10:32). The Israelites then conquered Gezer, Eglon, Hebron, Debir, and Hazor (10:33-39; 11:1-1). “So all the cities of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua took and struck with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed them,

as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded” (Joshua 11:12).

God had the Israelites kill countless thousands, perhaps millions, of people throughout the land of Canaan. It was genocide in the sense that it was a planned, systematic, limited extermination of a number of nation states from a relatively small area in the Middle East (cf. “Genocide,” 2000; cf. also “Genocide,” 2012). But, it was not a war against a particular race (from the Greek *genos*) or ethnic group. Nor were the Israelites commanded to pursue and kill the Canaanite nations if they fled from Israel’s Promised Land. The Israelites were to drive out and dispossess the nations of their land (killing all who resisted the dispossession), but they were not instructed to annihilate a particular race or ethnic group from the face of the Earth.

Still, many find God’s commands to conquer and destroy the Canaanite nation states problematic. How could a loving God instruct one group of people to kill and conquer another group? America’s most well-known critic of Christianity in the late 1700s and early 1800s, Thomas Paine (one of only a handful of America’s Founding Fathers who did not claim to be a Christian), called the God of the Old Testament “the Mars of the Jews, the fighting God of Israel,” Who was “boisterous, contemptible, and vulgar” (Paine, 1807). Two centuries later, Richard Dawkins (arguably the most famous atheist in the world today), published his book *The God Delusion*, which soon became a *New York Times* bestseller. One of the most oft-quoted phrases from this work comes from page 31, where Dawkins called God, a “racist, infantidal, genocidal...capriciously malevolent bully” (2006). According to one search engine, this quote (in part or in whole) is found on-line approximately one million times. The fact is, critics of the God of the Bible are fond of repeating the allegation that, because of His instruction to the Israelites to kill millions of people in their conquest of Canaan, the God

of the Bible has (allegedly) shown Himself to be an unruly, shameful, offensive, genocidal, “evil monster” (Dawkins, p. 248; cf. Hitchens, 2007, p. 107).

WAS GOD’S CAMPAIGN AGAINST CANAAN IMMORAL?

HOW could a supremely good (Mark 10:18), all-loving (1 John 4:8), perfectly holy God (Leviticus 11:44–45) order the Israelites to slay with swords myriads of human beings, letting “none remain” in Canaan? Is not such a planned, systematic extermination of nations equivalent to the murderous actions of the Nazis in the 1930s and 40s, as atheists and other critics of Christianity would have us believe? In truth, God’s actions in Israel’s conquest of Canaan were in perfect harmony with His supremely loving, merciful, righteous, just, and holy nature.

Punishing Evildoers is Not Unloving

Similar to how **merciful** parents, principals, policemen, and judges can **justly** administer punishment to rule-breakers and evildoers, so too can the all-knowing, all-loving Creator of the Universe. Loving parents and principals have administered corporal punishment appropriately to children for years (cf. Proverbs 13:24). Merciful policemen, who are constantly saving the lives of the innocent, have the authority (both from God and the government—Romans 13:1–4) to kill a wicked person who is murdering others. Just judges have the authority to sentence a depraved child rapist to death. Loving-kindness and corporal or capital punishment are not antithetical. Prior to conquering Canaan, God commanded the Israelites, saying,

You shall not hate your brother in your heart.... You shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.... And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself (Leviticus 19:17–18, 33–34; cf. Romans 13:9).

The faithful Jew was expected, as are Christians, to “not resist an evil per-

son” (Matthew 5:39) but rather “go the extra mile” (Matthew 5:41) and “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39). “Love,” after all, “is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10; cf. Matthew 22:36–40). Interestingly, however, the Israelite was commanded to punish (even kill) law-breakers. Just five chapters after commanding the individual Israelite to “not take vengeance,” but “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), God twice said that murderers would receive the death penalty (Leviticus 24:21, 17).

The Wickedness of the Inhabitants of Canaan

The Canaanite nations were punished because of their extreme wickedness. God did not cast out the Canaanites for being a particular race or ethnic group. God did not send the Israelites into the land of Canaan to destroy a number of **righteous** nations. On the contrary, the Canaanite nations were **horribly depraved**. They practiced “abominable customs” (Leviticus 18:30) and did “detestable things” (Deuteronomy 18:9, NASB). They practiced idolatry, witchcraft, soothsaying, and sorcery. They attempted to cast spells upon people and call up the dead (Deuteronomy 18:10–11).

Their “cultic practice was barbarous and thoroughly licentious” (Unger, 1954, p. 175). Their “deities...had no moral character whatever,” which “must have brought out the worst traits in their devotees and entailed many of the most demoralizing practices of the time,” including sensuous nudity, orgiastic nature-worship, snake worship, and even child sacrifice (Unger, 1954, p. 175; cf. Albright, 1940, p. 214). As Moses wrote, the inhabitants of Canaan would “burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods” (Deuteronomy 12:30). The Canaanite nations were anything but “innocent.” In truth, “[t]hese Canaanite cults were utterly immoral, decadent, and corrupt, dangerously contaminating and thoroughly justifying the divine command to destroy their devotees” (Unger, 1988). They were so nefarious that God said they defiled the land and the land could stomach them no longer—“the land vomited out its inhabitants” (Leviticus 18:25). [NOTE: Israel was an imperfect nation (as

all nations are), but God still used them to punish the Canaanites. God warned Israel before ever entering Canaan, however, that if they forsook His law, they, too, would be severely punished (Deuteronomy 28:15ff). In fact, similar to how God used the Israelites to bring judgment upon the inhabitants of Canaan in the time of Joshua, He used the pagan nations of Babylon and Assyria to judge and conquer Israel hundreds of years later.]

The Longsuffering of God

Unlike the foolish, impulsive, quick-tempered reactions of many men (Proverbs 14:29), the Lord is “slow to anger and great in mercy” (Psalm 145:8). He is “longsuffering..., not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Immediately following a reminder to the Christians in Rome that the Old Testament was “written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope,” the apostle Paul referred to God as “the God of patience” (Romans 15:4–5). Throughout the Old Testament, the Bible writers portrayed God as longsuffering.

Though in Noah’s day, “the wickedness of man was great in the earth” and “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5), “the Divine longsuffering waited” (1 Peter 3:20). (It seems as though God delayed flooding the Earth for 120 years as His Spirit’s message of righteousness was preached to a wicked world—Genesis 6:3; 2 Peter 2:5.) In the days of Abraham, God ultimately decided to spare the iniquitous city of Sodom, not if 50 righteous people were found living therein, but only **10** righteous individuals.

And what about prior to God’s destruction of the Canaanite nations? Did God quickly decide to cast them out of the land? Did He respond to the peoples’ wickedness like an impulsive, reckless mad-man? Or was He, as the Bible repeatedly states and exemplifies, longsuffering? Indeed, God waited. He waited more than four centuries to bring judgment upon the inhabitants of Canaan. Although the Amorites were already a sinful people in Abraham’s day, God

delayed in giving the descendants of the patriarch the Promised Land. He would wait until the Israelites had been in Egypt for hundreds of years, because at the time that God spoke with Abraham “the iniquity of the Amorites” was “not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16). [NOTE: “The Amorites were so numerous and powerful a tribe in Canaan that they are sometimes named for the whole of the ancient inhabitants, as they are here” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, 1997).] In Abraham’s day, the inhabitants of Canaan were not so degenerate that God would bring judgment upon them. However, by the time of Joshua (more than 400 years later), the Canaanites’ iniquity was full, and God used the army of Israel to destroy them.

Yes, God is longsuffering, but His long-suffering is not an “eternal” suffering. His patience with impenitent sinners eventually ends. It ended for a wicked world in the days of Noah. It ended for Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Abraham. And it eventually ended for the inhabitants of Canaan, whom God justly destroyed.

What About the Innocent Children?

The children of Canaan were not guilty of their parents’ sins (cf. Ezekiel 18:20); they were sinless, innocent, precious human beings (cf. Matthew 18:3-5; see Butt, 2003). So how could God justly take the lives of children, any children, “who have no knowledge of good and evil” (Deuteronomy 1:39)? The fact is, as Dave Miller properly noted, “Including the children in the destruction of such populations actually spared them from a worse condition—that of being reared to be as wicked as their parents and thus face eternal punishment. All persons who die in childhood, according to the Bible, are ushered to Paradise and will ultimately reside in Heaven. Children who have parents who are evil must naturally suffer innocently while on Earth (e.g., Numbers 14:33)” (Miller, 2009). God, the Giver of life (Acts 17:25; Ecclesiastes 12:7), and only God has the right to take the life of His creation whenever He chooses (for the righteous purposes that He has). At times in history, God took the life of men out of righteous judg-

ment. At other times (as in the case of children), it was taken for merciful reasons. [NOTE: For a superb, extensive discussion on the relationship between (1) the goodness of God, (2) the contradictory, hideousness of atheism, and (3) God bringing about the death of various infants throughout history, see Kyle Butt’s article “Is God Immoral for Killing Innocent Children?” (2009).]

CONCLUSION

THOUGH the enemies of the God of the Bible are frequently heard criticizing Israel’s conquest of Canaan, the fact is, such a conquest was in complete harmony with God’s perfectly loving, holy, and righteous nature. After patiently waiting for hundreds of years, God eventually used the Israelites to bring judgment upon myriads of wicked Canaanites. Simultaneously, He spared their children a fate much worse than physical death—the horror of growing up in a reprehensible culture and becoming like their hedonistic parents—and immediately ushered them into a pain-free, marvelous place called Paradise (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43).

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SPEAKING SCHEDULES

Kyle Butt

May 3-5
May 8
May 17-19

Eric Lyons

May 7
May 8
May 11
May 19

Dave Miller

May 3-4
May 16-17
May 29
May 30

Jeff Miller

May 2,9,16,23
May 3

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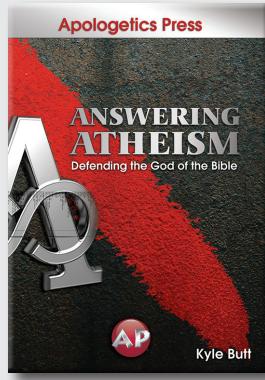
NOTE FROM *The Editor*



New DVD on Atheism

It is truly shocking to see the extent to which atheism, skepticism, and rejection of the Christian worldview have infiltrated American life in the past half century. High profile atheists are brazen in their boisterous defamations of God and Christianity. It is equally disheartening to see the feeble response that has emanated from the Christian community. The failure of so many churches to focus on the truly significant aspects of spiritual reality, in exchange for touchy-feely entertainment and “better felt than told” antics, has left enormous numbers of young people vulnerable to the evolutionary propaganda that dominates public education. Indeed, the average American is ill-equipped to offer an effective refutation to the subversive ploys of atheism.

In our continuing effort to “wage the good warfare” and “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 1:18; 6:12), Apologetics Press has recently released yet another tool for aiding in this monumental battle by providing assistance to withstand the unbelief and skepticism that have swept across American



culture. *Answering Atheism: Defending the God of the Bible* (by Kyle Butt) provides solid responses to atheistic accusations, including their claim that the Bible writers condone immorality, that they approve of sexism and cruel human slavery, and that atheism offers a much better moral system than the Bible. *Answering Atheism* strips these groundless accusations of their misleading trappings, and lays bare the fact that God and His Word provide the only viable foundation upon which to build a moral system. Topic titles include: “Moral Implications of Atheism,” “The Bible and Slavery,” “The Biblical View of Women,” “Evil, Pain, and Suffering,” and “A Loving God and an Eternal Hell.” Please consider ordering copies to give to friends, family, and young people in your acquaintance.

Dave Miller

See the Center Spread
for More Details